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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
RSB-176, November 6, 1962

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT: Implications of the Cuban Crisis for the Soviet Internal Scene

While we have no real intelligence as to the effect of the Cuban crisis on the Soviet leadership, the following speculative consideration of various factors in this problem may be of some use.

Regime Shaken

The Soviet leadership was undoubtedly shaken by the Cuban crisis but the extent to which its stability was affected is not clear. There is as yet no evidence to suggest that Khrushchev or any other leader has gained or lost significantly in status or that a leadership shake-up has occurred. The regime probably decided originally to install missiles in Cuba only after much heated discussion and perhaps disagreement; difference of opinion and disarray on how to handle the situation undoubtedly erupted following the President's October 22 speech and continued the rest of that week. It would be unusual if, following such a fiasco, there were not even a slight change in the leadership arrangement in the not too distant future.

Original Decision More Determinative

The extent to which strong positions were taken by Khrushchev or other leaders for or against the original decision to install the missiles will probably determine the extent of repercussions in the leadership. Disagreement after October 22 is likely to have been on tactical points of how best to extricate the USSR from the situation with the least political and military loss, and such disarray would not be as significant in its effect on the status of leaders as their original positions. It is possible that there was considerable unity among Soviet leaders on the need for a pull-back, including those who miscalculated what the US response would be.

Khrushchev's Position Possibly Strengthened

If Khrushchev was the original instigator of the Cuban missile venture, he would now find himself much more vulnerable to controversy with and criticism from his colleagues and certainly would have suffered some loss of authority in policy-making. It is more likely, however, given his past proclivity for

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economic and political pressures rather than more militant actions, that Khrushchev had reservations about the operation but in the end went along with it and, of course, was spokesman for the regime. Moreover, faced with the sharp and perhaps unexpectedly quick reaction from the US, Khrushchev was probably one of, if not the first, to suggest a pull-back and call attention to the miscalculation. The letters to the President have the stamp of Khrushchev's personal participation and concern. If these assumptions are correct, Khrushchev's authority in the leadership is probably somewhat enhanced at the present time. The dispatch of Mikoyan to Cuba would further suggest -- because of their past identity of view -- that Khrushchev has not suffered a loss of face in the leadership.

Role of the Military

The Soviet military undoubtedly played a significant advisory role in the decision to withdraw the missile sites from Cuba, but there is nothing to suggest that they have brought extraordinary pressure to bear on the Soviet leadership and now are controlling Soviet policy-making in the aftermath of the crisis. The Soviet military exercise their influence primarily through political leaders, are not completely united themselves on policy, and tend to be cautious in certain instances when their interests are involved. The opportunity to redress an unfavorable military balance by the Cuban gambit undoubtedly appealed to the military, and they probably advocated it as long as the venture stopped short of anything touching off hostilities. The confrontation by a strong US reaction and show of strength and purpose, especially at a time when the missile sites were not completed, probably resulted in an immediate shift of position by the military and pressure on the leadership to withdraw rapidly.

Effect on Population

The average citizen will be considerably relieved by the outcome of the Cuban crisis, and Khrushchev will probably enjoy an increase in public acclaim. Many Soviet citizens, however, were undoubtedly astounded by the revelations of October 27 and 28 on the existence of "grim" weapons in Cuba, placed there and controlled by their government. There will be, moreover, considerable head-shaking among intellectuals who read the press more carefully for nuances of policy in Soviet propaganda, and the regime in general will have to endeavor to counter a somewhat tarnished reputation. The Voroshilov article in Pravda on November 3 is undoubtedly partly motivated by a desire to resuscitate faith in the regime.

The degree of enthusiasm over the avoidance of war and the loss of faith in the regime, however, are difficult to measure. The normal citizen may not have been aware of how serious this situation was, compared to previous crises.

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He has to some extent become immune to propaganda build-ups, and this one occurred rapidly and then had to be manipulated in a sudden shift of line. The demonstrations before the US Embassy certainly were milder than in the past, but this fact was due primarily to the regime's reluctance to encourage such activity after its experience in 1961 and earlier.

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